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EMPATHY AS A TOOL FOR LEARNING ABOUT EVALUATIVE FEATURES OF OBJECTS

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ABSTRACT: It is generally agreed that empathy can give us knowledge about others. However, the potential use of empathy as a tool to learn about features of objects in the world more generally, as opposed to learning only about others' internal states, has not been discussed in the literature. In this paper I make the claim that empathy can help us learn about evaluative features of objects in the world. I further defend this claim by comparing empathy to testimony. Then I present and respond to two possible objections to this analogy.

KEYWORDS: empathy, experiential imagination, testimony, emotional evaluation, epistemic practice, knowledge

1. Introduction

In this paper I will discuss one of the epistemic functions of imagining what it is like to be another person. I will call this imagining 'empathic.' Even though the way the term 'empathy' is used varies greatly,[1] this activity of imagining is in line with many accounts of empathy which see it primarily as an activity of the imagination.[2] What is important for the purpose of this paper is that I assume that empathy involves among other things imagining *what it is like* to be the other person, i.e. imaginings with a phenomenal content to them, that involve the realisation that to be the other feels like *this*. This is an example of what Dokic and Arcangeli refer to as "experiential" imagination: "we shall spell out the notion of experiential imagination as the imaginative capacity to re-create experiential perspectives."[3] Experiential imagination is similar to Goldman's "enactment"

[1] Karsten Stueber, "Empathy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/empathy/.

[2] There are other accounts, e.g. those that see empathy as an affective response not necessarily mediated by imagination, or a kind of approval and understanding of another person. However, the view of empathy as imagining is wide-spread.

[3] Jérôme Dokic and Margherita Arcangeli, *The Heterogeneity of Experiential Imagination* (Open

imagination (or E-imagination) which is "a matter of creating or trying to create in one's own mind a selected mental state, or at least a rough facsimile of such a state, through the faculty of the imagination."[4,5]

There has been no shortage of discussion in the literature about the epistemic function of empathic imagining with the goal of understanding another person. These discussions have been about the extent to which empathy can serve as a way to obtain knowledge of other people's states.The question that has been discussed is to what extent we can rely on empathy to obtain knowledge about what the other person's state is. Different accounts vary in their levels of optimism about the prospect of obtaining reliable information from empathy in this sense. But safe from the most pessimistic accounts it is agreed that via empathy we can learn something about the state of another person.[6]

But another topic seems to have received little attention in philosophy, so much so that the present author can find no reference to it in the literature. It is about the epistemic function of empathic imagining with the goal of obtaining knowledge about things in the world, beyond the state of the person we are empathising with.

In this paper I will argue that empathy allows us to obtain knowledge about objects in the world. It does so, because imagining another's state involves imagining their evaluations of objects in the world and thus allows us access to these evaluations. To strengthen the claim that this practice is epistemically valuable, I will draw an analogy between empathy and testimony, which is an epistemically robust practice. Then I will raise and anwer to two objections to the analogy. One is that testimony is not effective when it comes to evaluative

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MIND. Frankfurt am Main: MIND Group, 2014), https://doi.org/10.15502/9783958570085.

[4] Alvin I. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 42, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195138929.001.0001/acprof-9780195138924.

[5] Kind speaks of a similar kind of imagining, referring to it "recreative" imagining. Amy Kind, "Desire-Like Imagination," *CMC Faculty Publications and Research*, 1 January 2016, http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_fac_pub/533; see also Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

[6] Of course, this something depends on many factors, such as how much prior information we have about the person and their situation. If I have known you all my life I am likely to be better able to imagine what you are going through than if I just met you. Another factor is that people's ability to empathise well varies greatly: we all know people who seem to incapable of getting even the most obvious distress, as well as others who can read us so well to the extent that we feel uncomfortably exposed in their presence.

properties of objects. The other is that testimony without a speech-act is at best a very weak form of testimony.

2. Empathy – Testimony Without the Middle Man

Empathy gives us information about the state of another person. Now I will make the case that it therefore also gives us information about features of objects[7] in the world. The reason for that is that one's experiences are directly tied up with one's environment, and hence one's (emotional) state is usually closely connected to features of the external world. For the most part our emotions are directed at the external world. Emotions have intentionality; they are about objects, and represent the world as being in a certain way.[8] They often reflect some kind of evaluation, or appraisal, one has of a certain object. In the most rough form possible: if I fear swimming in the river then I believe that (or judge that) swimming in the river is dangerous; if I trust Alex, then I believe that (or judge that) Alex is the kind of person that merits trust, and so on. Virtually all accounts of emotion agree that emotions represent the world as being a certain way.[9]

Emotional evaluations carry information about evaluative properties of the object the emotion is directed to. They are evaluations with a phenomenal feel to them.[10] Correspondingly, evaluative properties of objects are properties "whose recognition merits a certain sort of response."[11] For example, dangerousness is an evaluative property; the response merited by something dangerous is fear "with all that this emotional experience involves, including thought, feeling, and action."[12] If swimming in the river is evaluated as dangerous, this carries the information that fear is the appropriate response to swimming in the river.

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[7] I use 'objects' in the broadest possible sense: what counts as an object would involve physical objects, but also ideas, people, situations, and other things.

[8] Andrea Scarantino and Ronald de Sousa, "Emotion," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/emotion/.

[9] This is in contrast to the now largely rejected "dumb view" on emotions, according to which emotions are just feelings. See, e.g. Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Inquiry* 32, 2 (January 1989): 151–76, https://doi.org/10.1080/00201748908602185.

[10] I am neutral on the question of whether, apart from emotional evaluations, there are other kinds of evaluations of objects which have a distinctive phenomenological feel to them, or whether all such evaluations could be considered emotional evaluations.

[11] Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 30.

[12] Goldie, 30.

Different accounts of emotion offer different answers to how the feel of an emotion relates to the emotional evaluation. For example, according to a view advocated by Prinz emotions are embodied appraisals – they represent objects in the environment, and the phenomenal feel of an emotion is what makes us aware of this representation.[13] Emotions are not compounds of judgments and embodied appraisals, but rather "embodied appraisals that have been recalibrated by judgments to represent somewhat different relations to the environment."[14] But on most accounts of emotion, emotional evaluations are in some way tied to an emotional experience's phenomenological feel, and the way an emotion 'feels' carries some information about the corresponding emotional evaluation.[15]

If empathy involves imagining how you feel about a certain thing, then empathy allows me access to your emotional evaluations of features in the environment you are in. From this I can learn something about this environment. For instance, if via empathising I figure out that you are afraid of the upcoming exam, then I have also learned that the upcoming exam is on material you are not well prepared for. In almost all cases where we learn something about others via empathy, the other side of the coin is that we have learned something about the environment these others are embedded in and have enriched our understanding of the world beyond the state of the particular person whose situation we had imagined.

Importantly, what I can learn via empathy here is limited to evaluative features of objects. There are a lot of things that I cannot learn via empathy, as for example, physical facts about objects like the fact that the chair is green or that water is H_2O. I cannot learn these things because they are not the sort of things that would normally evoke an evaluative response in you which has a distinctive phenomenal feel. Therefore, experientially imagining your experience is unlikely to give me information about such things. I can only learn similar facts from you if you tell them to me explicitly. What I can learn via empathising with you concerns features of objects that would provoke an evaluative response in you with certain distinctive phenomenology, as for example, emotional response: I can learn that a certain work of art or a certain person's deed is admirable, that swimming in the river is fearsome, that a certain meal is disgusting, and so on.

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[13] Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion*, Philosophy of Mind (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[14] Prinz, 99.
[15] An emotion's phenomenological feel is an important aspect of emotional experience – this is so on virtually all accounts of emotion, excluding what Prinz calls "pure cognitive theories." (Prinz, 10).

I am suggesting that the inference occurs in two steps. First, I obtain knowledge what a certain object, P, is for you. Then I infer what P might be for me. In the first step I experientially imagine your state which involves imagining a particular phenomenal *feel* of the emotion you are undergoing – imagining that you feel like *this*. In this way, I have access to your emotional evaluation of the object. Then, in the second step, I use your evaluation in order to infer the corresponding evaluative features of the object.

For example, if you are telling me about an episode of confrontation with one of your colleagues, when I empathise with you I will figure out that you felt like *this* about them. What I have already learned is that your colleague has the sort of features to which *you* would react in this way. From here I might be also able to take a second step and form a picture of what kind of features your colleague is likely to 'objectively' possess, or if one doesn't want to commit to there being objective traits in this sense, I can infer what kind of features *I* might perceive your colleague as having.

In order for the second step in the inference to be successful I need to know enough about the extent to which you are likely to react to the relevant objects in a similar way as myself. Sometimes this might be a relatively ambitious task, for example when the emotional evaluation is directed towards a person. If I form the judgment that you feel like *this* towards Ben, unless I know you very well, I would not be able to infer reliably almost anything about Ben, because of the complex ways in which people's characters react to one another. At other times, however, when the object in question is a physical object in the environment to which most people are likely to have similar evaluative responses, the possibility of inferring things reliably about it is not so far-fetched. For example, if you feel some kind of unease, about visiting a particular bar, perhaps I do not need to know you too well to be able to infer that I, too, am likely to feel uneasy about visiting that place, and to also consider it dodgy. Since I am not making a claim about how often we can rely on empathy to learn about objects in the world in this way, the fact that there are complex cases where the inference is not likely to be successful unless I know you well, is not a counterexample to what I am trying to show. All I am trying to show is that via empathy we make use of other epistemic agents' understanding of the world, and we can appropriate it (or adjust it) to expand our own understanding.

Now a question that suggests itself isthe extent to which other epistemic agents' evaluations of objects in the world would be epistemically useful to us. I will defend the claim that it is useful by drawing a parallel between empathy and testimony.

Testimony is an ubiquitous source of knowledge and our dependence on it is far-reaching.[16] It is a robust epistemic practice, and is one of our sources of knowledge together with perception, memory, and reasoning. We usually accept ordinary informative testimony – normally it is infeasible "for hearers to seriously check or confirm either the speaker's reliability or sincerity within the normal constraints of testimonial transmission and exchange."[17] It is an open question under what conditions testimony is a justified source of knowledge. Non-reductionists hold that what is required is only the absence of undefeated defeaters whereas according to reductionists some actual positive reasons are necessary too in order to accept the testimony of speakers.[18] However, it is universally accepted that we can, and that we do, attain knowledge from what others tell us.

The parallel between empathy and testimony is the following. In both cases I have not attained the knowledge of an object first-hand. In the case of testimony, I rely on your evaluation of X, which you share with me via a speech act. In the case of empathy, I rely on your evaluation of X, which I access via experientially imagining your state. In this sense empathy is like testimony without the middle man. In testimony I rely upon your assertion in order to access your knowledge about an object. In empathy you need not tell me anything – I rely upon my experientially imagining your state, in order to gain epistemic access to your emotional evaluation of the object. And if we accept that testimony is sufficiently often a reliable source of epistemic benefits, we should be justified to accept the same about empathy. If it is undeniable that our practice of testimony is epistemically robust, and if it is true that there is an analogy between empathy and testimony, then it would seem that arriving at epistemic benefits via empathy would be epistemically justified. The hope here is that whatever it is that justifies testimony as a source of knowledge, can justify why empathy too is a source of knowledge. In both cases your evaluative knowledge of certain objects in the environment is transmitted to me – it is just that it happens without your explicit assertion.

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[16] Lackey Jennifer, "Knowing from Testimony," *Philosophy Compass* 1, 5 (2006): 432–48, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00035.x; Jonathan Adler, "Epistemological Problems of Testimony," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entriesestimony-episprob/.

[17]Adler, "Epistemological Problems of Testimony."

[18] Lackey Jennifer, "Knowing from Testimony."

3. Objections: Empathy Is Unlike Testimony

However, there are important differences between empathy and testimony and one might wonder whether the analogy between the two is justified. If it is not justified, one might wonder to what extent I could be justified to infer, from the fact that *you* evaluate an object X in a way E, that X is an appropriate object of such an evaluation.There are two reasons one might reject the analogy. I will consider these challenges now.

3.1 Objection 1 – Testimony About Evaluative Properties Is Problematic

The first reason the analogy between empathy and testimony might fail is that there is an important difference between the domain of things I can learn by empathy and the domain of things it is usually agreed I can learn via testimony. Via testimony I can attain knowledge of facts – that water is H_2O or that the museum is behind the corner. However, this is not the sort of thing I can learn via empathy. Via empathy I can only attain knowledge about evaluative features of objects. Hence empathy is at best like *testimony about evaluative properties* only. And one might wonder about the extent to which evaluative testimony – unlike testimony for physical properties of mid-sized objects, directions in a city, or train times – can be a reliable and justified epistemic practice. If testimony is not a reliable and justified source of epistemic goods in this sense, then it is not clear why empathy should be one. Perhaps evaluative aspects of objects are just not the sort of thing about which we can rely on attaining knowledge second-hand, be it via testimony or empathy.

There is an essential dissimilarity between beliefs and evaluations. Evaluations are more subjective and personal, whereas beliefs are more objective. Whereas I can take your word for statements such as "the museum is behind the corner" and "water is H_2O," perhaps I cannot take your word for statements such as "the picture is beautiful" and "John is trustworthy" since these evaluations would have an important subjective element. They are the kind of things that it is possible that are true for you, but might not be true for me. Because of this difference between the two, it seems that evaluative knowledge is less straightforward to attain second-hand than knowledge of facts. Whereas I can simply rely on your testimony that the museum is behind the corner, it is less clear why I should accept your statement that the movie is imaginative. The appropriateness of an object evaluation is relative to the person who evaluates it. And one might worry that in some cases people's emotions towards the same object can differ drastically in a way in which we would not normally expect their beliefs to differ.

In short, the worry is that from your evaluating an object in a certain way I cannot simply infer that I should evaluate it in the same way because of the subjective element that you bring with your evaluation. However, it seems that I can still attain knowledge about that object because I might be able to accommodate the subjective element via taking into account relevant differences between you and me, and infer what kind of evaluation I should be having of that object. Even if it is more complex than assessing the reliability of a speaker in testimony, it does seem possible that I might be able to infer from evaluations you are having about certain objects, what evaluations I should be having about these objects.

Taking another's evaluation to reflect an object's features might not be as straightforward as taking their beliefs concerning that object to reflect an object's features, but at least in some cases I can adjust for differences between you and me. If I know sufficiently many things about you, I would know for example where you and I differ, and what adjustments I need to make to your evaluations in order for me to be able to accept them as epistemic evidence of certain evaluative aspects of objects. I might have independent reasons to discredit your evaluation. Say, for example, that you are terrified by a spider in the kitchen. If you have a phobia of spiders and I know you, I would know that you have a phobia, and I would not take your emotional evaluation as direct evidence of the scariness of that spider. The opposite can also be true – I might have independent reasons to allocate especially large epistemic credibility to your evaluation. If I know that you are a zoologist without phobias, and if you are particularly alarmed by a spider in the kitchen, I would infer that the spider in the kitchen is perhaps a poisonous one and I should beware it.

Perhaps the least controversial case of me learning about the world via empathy is the case where I know you particularly well. Say you are my best friend, my sibling, my partner, or someone else who is really close. If I know you sufficiently well it seems that it will be very easy for me to infer from your emotional evaluations whether or not certain features about the objects of these evaluations hold. Say you and I are very similar in our appraisals of people – we find particular features in people morally repugnant, we hold particular values in high regard, and so on. If you react emotionally to a certain person I do not know in a particular way – say, with a kind of derision, or admiration – I will know that this person is more likely than not a person whom I myself would consider an appropriate object of derision, or admiration. I doubt it that someone would deny that in *these* specific cases, where we empathise with people we know very well, we can learn something about the world from them.

The question now is to what extent this learning can happen in other cases. One might object that in order to do the appropriate adjustments reliably I need to know you well. This might be true for more complex evaluations such as those concerning other people's characters, where it seems that I indeed need to know you well in order to interpret your evaluation in a sensible way. However, for more basic evaluations such as responses to physically dangerous objects, it seems that I can take on board your evaluation even if I do not know you well. But even if empathy works well as a source of epistemic goods about the world in the limited cases of people we know wellthis doesn't mean empathy isn't in this sense epistemically valuable, since we tend to interact a lotmore with people who are closer to us and we know well. So those are two reasons to believe that attaining knowledge about evaluative features of objects in the world via empathy might be more pervasive than it initially seems. But even so my claim is a weak one – insofar as I have shown that learning about the world via empathy happens at least sometimes, I have shown what I was aiming to.

3.2 Objection 2 – Testimony Takes Its Epistemic Credentials From the Speech-act

There is another reason to doubt that the analogy between testimony and empathy holds. One can hold that that which makes testimony a justified source of knowledge is essentially linked to the speech act of assertion in testimony. If that is true, then there is a crucial disanalogy between testimony and empathy – the difference between the two is not just an incidental, but an essential property of what makes testimony the epistemically robust practice that it is. Therefore, one would not be able to infer, from the fact that testimony is a justified epistemic practice, that empathy could be one too.

What is sometimes called the "assurance view" of testimony is the view according to which testimonial knowledge is warranted because the speech-act itself is assurance that what the testifier says is true.[19] There is some attraction to the view that it is the norms of the conversational practice, and something about assuming responsibility for what I have said to you, that makes testimony reliable:

To use Kant's example: If I start to pack my suitcase in front of you, but I have no plan to leave then I intentionally deceive you by giving you evidence that I plan to leave. But I do not invite you to notice or to understand what I am doing. By contrast, if I said to you either 'I am leaving town' (a lie) or 'Do not worry if you do not find me here tomorrow' (an intentionally misleading assertion), I do invite

[19] Nickel, Philip et al., "Assurance Views of Testimony," in *Routledge Handbook of Social Epistemology* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 96–102, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717937.

you to understand and believe me. Thereby, I assume responsibility for the truth and veracity of my assertion, though arguably less so for the implicature that 'I am leaving town.'[20]

There is no equivalent to this responsibility-taking in the case of empathy. I have no responsibility to have certain emotional evaluations of objects, at least not in the way in which I might be assumed to have in the case of asserting true statements. I might feel whatever I want to feel and have whatever evaluations I have of certain objects, and I will not be sanctioned in any way for doing that. By contrast, assertion of something untrue is generally sanctioned and assertion has to abide by certain norms of conversational practice that imply not deceiving or providing unjustified information. Hence it might seem that unlike relying on others' assertions, sourcing knowledge from others' emotional evaluations, is not a reliable source of epistemic goods.

One line of reply might be to try to argue that there are some social norms of emotional evaluation. For example, we usually don't trust people who display a different emotion from the one they are actually experiencing. We like and value spontaneous people and value genuine emotional expressivity and people who are sincere with their emotions.[21] So one might think there is some kind of equivalent of the norms of conversational practice in the emotional evaluation domain. We read each other's emotions all the time and to a certain extent we rely on others' evaluations being adequate, and this does make it likely that via empathy I would attain knowledge of objects.

Another line of response is to turn the objection on its head – to agree that there is a disanalogy between cases of learning via testimony and cases of learning via empathy, but to claim that it is *precisely* in the disanalogy between speaking and emotions, that makes learning via empathy a valuable source of knowledge. Let me elaborate. As a speaker I know that there are certain rules of conversational practice by which I better abide. I know that you, as a hearer, are on the look-out for what I say. This might make me carefully calculate what I say, and thus, by merely listening to what I say, you might not be able to get at what I *really believe*. Empathy, by contrast, offers us more of a window into what your actual evaluations of things are. You might say one thing but feel another, and if I do not empathise with you, I will not get what it is that you actually feel, which seems an important part of your evaluative judgment of things. This is based on the

[20] Adler, "Epistemological Problems of Testimony."

[21] According to some, one of the reasons spontaneity is valued is because it is hard to fake, e.g. Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2014).

assumptions that (1) it is harder to fake an emotion than assert an untruth, since the former requires to put on an act, which is very involving, and most of us are not very well trained in controlling carefully our emotional expressions and our body language, among others; and (2) that I will not be so careful in orchestrating my emotions, or even think about doing it, because emotions are not part of a conversational practice in the same way as words are, so I would not be so likely to begin monitoring them in the first place. If these assumptions are any likely, in empathic transmission of information you have less opportunity to deceive me and empathy would allow me an insight into your honest evaluations of things, which I might not get at merely via testimony.

Now one might perhaps wonder to what extent it is valuable for me to know your *honest* evaluations of things, as opposed to the ones you would have shared with me merely by speaking? I think that most of us would intuitively think that it is obvious that we want to know what people really think, but perhaps one might object to this. There are cases where one does not know something very well. Perhaps you honestly believe what you tell me, it is just that you cannot bring yourself to feel about it in a certain way. Say you have become totally convinced that a certain art-work is a work of genius – it is just that you do not really feel it. Or that you know what 'the right thing to do is' – to be polite and accepting of someone's view – it is just that you do not really feel you should do anything of the kind, perhaps the person in fact annoys you greatly. Now, will there be any value in my getting at these evaluations of yours? Perhaps it is undeniable that getting at them makes me know *you* better. But is getting at them valuable in terms of me learning something about the *objects* of your evaluation – of the art-work, and of what the right thing to do is in confrontation with that person? Since it seems possible that one's emotional evaluations might lead someone astray, whereas one's 'purely' reason-based evaluations are more often guaranteed to be on the right track, one might be seriously worried by these cases. However, it seems that even people who have this worry would be justified in holding that one is better for *not knowing* what another's actual emotional response to something is.

A third way to reply to the initial objection is to deny the claim that testimony takes all its epistemic credentials from the speech act. Instead, one can hold that testimony is at best partly justified by the existence of a conversational practice andwhat makes testimony justified is that via it we get access to the speaker's knowledge. What makes this a justified way to attain knowledge is something about people being in general good enough epistemic agents. If this is true, it seems that one would need further justification to argue that they aren't in general good enough evaluators. In further support of the view that the existence

of norms in conversation does not add much to the credibility of testimony, one can take the fact that in many ordinary cases of testimony, the speaker rarely thinks a few times before they produce an assertion. On the contrary, many of the assertions that we take to be good examples of testimony are often spontaneous. For example, most of us *would*, I think, take as a reliable piece of testimony a statement if it was one we overheard someone speaking to themselves. So there is no special step that the speaker takes in order to become intentionally a part of the social conversational practice. There is no reason, in many ordinary cases of testimony, to believe that something qualitatively different happens when the speaker is speaking to you, rather than were they merely to assert something to themselves aloud, or were they to write their words down in a notebook they do not intend for anyone to read. This is not an altogether strange view of what testimony is. For example, Sosa takes that all testimony requires "a statement of someone's thoughts of beliefs, which they might direct to the world at large and to no one in particular."[22] Hence it seems that it would be awkward to place *all epistemic justification* in testimony on the speech-act. In other words, if a conversational practice did not exist, but we were able to directly tap into people's beliefs about certain matters, that would be a reliable source of epistemic justification. Therefore, it seems hard to deny that testimony works not *only* because people abide by certain conversational practices alone but also because whatever it is that the speaker has 'in stock' in his mind, ready for assertion, will be in general reliable. Further, it is hard to see how even the most rigid conversational practice would be able to produce epistemic goods, if the latter were not the case. And if this claim is true it is hard to see why the same would not hold for the case of emotional evaluations. If we can accept that people are good enough sources of beliefs and epistemic knowledge, why deny that they are good enough sources of evaluations? In other words, it seems difficult to doubt that, in general, most people would have roughly appropriate emotional evaluations of certain objects a lot of the time. Hence accessing these evaluations and using them to inform our own evaluations of these objects seems an important epistemic function that, I hope to have shown, empathy can perform.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I argued that empathy is a valuable tool for understanding others, and for understanding objects in the world beyond the experiences of other people. I argued that empathising with another allows us to understand objects in the world

[22] Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 219.

via giving us access to their emotional evaluations of these objects; I compared empathy to testimony and argued that if we consider testimony as a source of epistemic goods, then we can consider empathy to be one too.